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SUBJECT: PRT KIRKUK: ARABS END PROVINCIAL COUNCIL BOYCOTT

Classified By: Kirkuk PRT leader Howard Keegan for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[¶1.](#) (U) This is a Kirkuk Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) message.

[¶2.](#) (C) Summary: The return of the Arab bloc members on December 4 to the Kirkuk Provincial Council peacefully resolved a year-long Sunni Arab boycott. Negotiations for the Arab bloc's return saw concessions by the ruling Kirkuk Brotherhood List (KBL) that included agreement on power-sharing and allotment of government positions in the province by community. The Turkmen Bloc meanwhile remains on the sidelines, pursuing an ineffective and increasingly isolated boycott of its own. End Summary.

A Boycott More in Name Than Political Impact

[¶3.](#) (C) Arab Bloc members of the Kirkuk Provincial Council (PC) ended a year-long PC boycott on December 4, 2007. Arab and Turkmen blocs, which had formed a strategic alliance, initiated the boycott in November 2006. The Kirkuk PC is made up of party blocs, including Arabs under the mantle of the Arab Gathering List party, Turkmen represented by the Turkmen Eli party (ITF), and the majority Kurdish-dominated Kirkuk Brotherhood List, which also comprises numerous smaller parties and factions.

[¶4.](#) (C) The boycott by Arab Bloc and ITF members did not have a substantial negative impact on the provincial government, as the KBL was able to muster and maintain a quorum at the PC in their absence and to ensure the effective functioning of the government. The boycotting members themselves maintained offices within the Kirkuk Government Building (KGB) and generally continued to participate in select committees and daily office functions. The boycotters greatly overestimated the impact of their action. Both groups in fact lost support from constituents as the months dragged on. The agreement between the Turkmen and Arabs was a loose association that never formalized itself with a true agreement of issues to settle the boycott.

Accelerating the Negotiations, Splitting the Blocs

[¶5.](#) (C) Starting in July, PRT Kirkuk was able to accelerate efforts to get all parties back to the table and resolve the boycott, capitalizing on anticipation of the September Congressional testimony by Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus. The Provincial Chairman and the KBL embraced the PRT initiative and started serious negotiations with both blocs. The initial meetings underlined the difference in demands between the strategic partners and eventually revealed increasing Arab and Turkmen faultlines, with each bloc pursuing a separate agenda. Individual Arab bloc members publicly denounced the call to continue joint negotiations and began applying internal pressure to other Arab bloc members to pursue an independent negotiation track. Starting in October, the Arab bloc undertook solo negotiations in earnest.

¶6. (C) After months of efforts and countless negotiation meetings, the Arab bloc appeared ready to reconcile and return to the council in late November. A last minute set of excuses based on the former Turkmen agreement prohibited a solution from being achieved on November 28 during a formal negotiation session with the KBL. To help resolve the impasse, the PRT met with key Arab bloc members and successfully convinced them of the need for their participation in the province's democratic process. Based on this meeting, bloc members drafted and signed a memo for media release stating that they agreed to the last of ten negotiation points and would rejoin the government.

Power-sharing Agreement as Efforts continue to bring Turkmen on Board

¶7. (C) On December 2, Arab bloc and KBL representatives signed a formal agreement outlining ten main points. Under the agreement, the Arab bloc secured the positions of Deputy Governor of Kirkuk province and Deputy Chairman of the yet-to-be-formed Kirkuk City Council. In addition, thirty-two percent of positions in the Kirkuk Provincial Government will now be allocated to each of the three ethnic groups -- Arab, Turkmen, and Kurd -- with the remaining four percent set aside for Christian minority groups. While key positions will be filled candidates from the Arab bloc nominations, formally rebalancing the ethnic levels of the provincial government (including Director General positions) will require approval from Baghdad authorities. The agreement outlined the formation of an executive committee to address matters arising during implementation, notably the formation of the city council, and to attempt to devise a compromise to ensure the formal return of the Turkmen bloc.

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¶8. (C) Both the Arab Bloc and KBL participated in a formal press conference following the signing, sealing the arrangement in front of most of Kirkuk's media. The participating parties highlighted the need for the Turkmen to rejoin government and pledged to work toward formation of a full unity government.

Arab Members Attend Provincial Council Meeting

¶9. (C) The defining moment of this new arrangement was reached on December 4, when Arab bloc members dutifully took their hither-to vacant seats at the regular provincial council meeting and actively participated in both discussion and voting phases. Their long absence from the political process was acknowledged by several returning Arab Bloc members, who furthermore addressed the PC in Kurdish (vice Arabic), which is the true universal language in Kirkuk. Both sides voiced optimism and pledged to work together to ensure that the perceived marginalization that had prompted the original boycott would not reoccur.

Comment: Turkmen Bloc Still a Problem

¶10. (C) Comment: PRT Kirkuk approached the Turkmen party on November 29 to check on their interest in rejoining negotiations to end the boycott. In what has become their trademark, the Turkmen not only refused the offer, but tacked on an additional condition for their return to the negotiating table. The evident objective of this ITF-dominated group is not to settle and seek resolution but to disrupt the democratic process. Their media declarations however indicate that their abandonment by the Arab bloc has placed additional pressure on the Turkmen bloc to demonstrate tangible benefits and results to their community from their continuing boycott. The Turkmen ITF leader is well known for his incendiary political remarks in the media, but now finds himself speaking with less authority as many in the Turkmen community are publicly questioning his tactics.

¶11. (C) Comment c'td: The head of the Arab delegation approached the Turkmen bloc on the day of the formal signing with a last minute request for them to rejoin the negotiations. Although the Turkmen bloc had indicated a willingness to participate, they did not show for the meeting. This was the final straw for the Arab delegation which realized it needed first and foremost to secure support within its own community. While there is much public attention to the need for the Turkmen bloc to rejoin the government, that prospect appears unlikely in the immediate future and is probably beyond reach. Their excessive promises to their community and self-isolation have produced a formidable cultural barrier to dialogue. The loss of respect will require a specially crafted solution by the KBL to facilitate the return of the Turkmen bloc, albeit with a bit less dignity than they would have been possible through a settlement several months ago.

¶12. (C) Comment c'td: The public commitment evinced at the press conference to reach out to the Turkmen bloc may help spur a return by this group to its rightful, elected place in the Kirkuk government. While a small step, this reconciliation with the Sunni Arabs is significant for improving relations between Kirkuk,s communities and may have significant implications for Article 140 implementation and any future referendum on Kirkuk,s status.
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